

Blame it on Mercator...

Numismagram Newsletter #164 (1/2026)



We're now a little over halfway through January and back with our second upload of new material for the month. Thus far, it's proving to be a rather wild year barely three full weeks in, with tensions alarmingly high on many fronts. At the center of one source of tension is something that may simply come down to maps. We're certainly familiar with world maps, and have seen them countless times over our lives, but a name that may not be as familiar now keeps popping up more and more—Gerardus Mercator. His creation of a style of projection for mapping—*converting the contents of the globe, which is spherical, as a more "stretched" canvas, such as a rectangle*—is ideal for sailing and navigation, as it preserves angles and directions, but also leads to massive distortion the further one moves away from the equator. As such, landmasses near the poles, like Antarctica and Greenland, look incredibly bigger than they actually are due to this distortion. Is this relevant? It's tough to say, but when we look at such projections, they do present a story that isn't the case, with the amount of land in certain areas simply not being what it appears. And, with all this map talk, here are the first two highlights from this upload...



This 1871 Belgian medal was issued for the First International Geographic Congress held in Antwerp. It pairs Mercator with another cartographer contemporaneous to him, Abraham Ortelius, who is credited with creating the first modern atlas. Here, a wondrously intricate map of the world is presented, notably with curved lines of longitude, thus giving at least a somewhat more accurate rendition of relative sizes than a full Mercator projection.

Our next preview displays only a portion of the globe, mainly focused upon Europe, and was issued to commemorate the life of Gustaf af Klint one year after his passing...



Klint was a cartographer and vice admiral in the Swedish navy, hence the Naval Service Society (*Orlogsmanna Sällskapet*) being the ones who issued this commemorative medal.



Along the lines of maps and territorial disputes, we have this flashy silver medal from 1963 (graded **PCGS SP-63**) for an agreement brokered between the United States and Mexico...



Known as the Chamizal dispute on account of the area of land in question, this disagreement had been growing for over half a century before its resolution in principle by presidents Kennedy and López Mateos. The traditional border between the two countries (in the area of the dispute) had been established as the Rio Grande at the conclusion of the Mexican-American War in 1848. Over the ensuing decades, however, floods caused the pathway of the Rio Grande to shift southward a bit, thus yielding additional territory (*that which was to the north side of the river*) to the United States. This area was then settled by the US, essentially being annexed by the growth of El Paso, Texas. An attempt to rectify the dispute was planned in 1909 by the then-presidents of the two nations, but a foiled assassination attempt scuttled such a meeting. It would be another half century before the dispute was ultimately settled, occurring in August 1963 just three months before Kennedy's assassination in Dallas.



Communication and dialogue is key in the relations of nations, and one of the earliest forms of international dialogue—one that allowed for faster response than with hand-delivered messages—was by cable. The laying of heavy-duty cable for the purposes of communication began in the mid-19th century, with one such firm taking a role in growing the connectivity between the United States and Central and South America. In 1928, the firm, by then known as the All America Cables, was celebrating her 50th anniversary, with this medal issued in commemoration...



By then, however, lines and cables weren't solely necessary, as a wireless form of telecommunication had since been discovered and popularized. Known in French as "télégraphie sans fil," wireless telegraphy revolutionized the field, with the shipping industry being an important early adopter. As a ship would inherently not be connected by wiring or cable, the means of communicating via those methods was impossible. With wireless telegraphy, however, the ability to send and receive messages, such as those of distress, were vital in avoiding potential disaster. Here, the skilled Eugène de Bremaecker presents a wondrous personification of this novel form of technology on a plaque from later in 1912...



Rounding out the highlights in this upload, we have a few pieces that may or may not have relevance to current events, such as the planting of a flag on newly-acquired territory...



...and the phrase “ultrix America juris,” or “America, the defender of the just”...



Given all of the alarming tensions of late, one can easily view the phrase upon the latter medal as more than a bit ironic.

For all of this upload's new items, please click [here](#) or on the banner art at the top of this newsletter. We'll be back again at the beginning of next month on Groundhog's Day with another selection of museum-quality art, historical, and contemporary medals.



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